

Shemati
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Subject Areas: Jewish Living and Identity, Tools/Games, Values, Jewish History & Culture, Hebrew

Multi-unit lesson plan

Target age: 7th -12th grade

Objectives: (a) students will be able to express and discuss their honest opinions, thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards Judaism
(b) Students will demonstrate ability to apply the word, and meaning of, '*shemati*' in a relevant and appropriate setting (c) Students will demonstrate ability to listen to one another attentively
(d) Students will demonstrate understanding of the process of a listening circle and will demonstrate ability to participate in a listening circle.

Part A

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Hebrew word "Shemati" means "I hear you." Let students know that in this activity, they will practice 'hearing' (listening to) each other. It is very important to establish emotional safety for this activity. Students should have some sense of community established, and should have already accomplished at least 2-3 teambuilding exercises before conducting the listening circle. The students will be 'breaking the ice' with more light hearted questions and answers at first, and then building to more serious and complex questions as the activity progresses. The goal is for students to be comfortable to express their honest opinions and attitudes about Judaism. A good idea for the teacher/facilitator is to be totally transparent with the students and let them know that you want them to feel safe to express themselves honestly, and that there is no judgement from you involved. You also may want to review the major Jewish holidays first to activate background knowledge for the activity. Make sure that you have reviewed the list of questions prepared below first, and adjust them for the grade level and maturity levels of your students.

STEPS

1. Frame the activity with what it means to listen. Introduce the Hebrew word "Shemati" and discuss its meaning. (Write the word on the board in English and in Hebrew). Ask students,

“What might the phrase ‘*I hear you*’ mean?” “How do we truly listen to another person?” Share out responses.

2. Demonstrate the process of listening. Choose a student to talk for about 20-30 seconds (choose a topic that will get them talking). When the student is done, say, “**Shemati.**” Tell students, “This means that I am saying to her that I heard her, and really listened to what she had to say.”
3. Establish listening groundrules and post so all students can refer to them: (a) no interrupting (b) eye contact (c) say ‘*shemati*’ when the person is clearly finished talking, but not before. Ground rules for talking: (a) stay on topic, don’t switch to a new topic (b) if you finish early, wait silently. Add any other ground rules they want to include.
4. Split the students into two groups with even numbers. If there is an odd number, you can participate or have students take turns switching out.
5. One group is the ‘inner’ circle (circle A) and one group is the ‘outer’ circle (circle B). The circles face each other.
6. They will take turns listening and then talking with the person they are facing. The people in circle A talk first, and the people in circle B listen first, for one minute, then they switch.
7. After the two minutes of listening/talking are over, **ONLY CIRCLE B**, the **OUTER** circle, moves one person to the left. Then begin the process again.
8. Emphasize that for each question and answer, the listener is not allowed to talk at all while the other student responds.
9. Encourage students to use up their minute, since they will have to stand there silently if they don’t. The younger the students, you may want to adjust the activity to 30-45 seconds per turn. Ask the first question.
10. Afterwards, debrief and ask students to rate how honest they felt they were. “1” for not very honest, “3” for somewhat honest, and “5” for very honest. If ratings are low, ask them what would help them to feel like they could be more honest. Other debrief questions: “What questions surprised you?” “What answers surprised you?” “What Q/A would you change or include?” “What is something new you learned about someone?”

MATERIALS: large dry erase board or sheet of paper; Markers; Clock or timer.

Prepared list of questions, including 'warm-ups' and more serious Jewish questions

QUESTIONS

- Do you have a hobby? Tell about something you like to do.
- Do you play any instruments? What would you like to learn?
- What animal would you choose if you could get any pet, and why?
- What are things you like and dislike about school, and why?
- When is a time you helped someone out, and how did that feel?
- When is a time someone helped you out, and how did that feel?
- What is your favorite Jewish holiday, and why?
- What is your least favorite Jewish holiday and why?
- What is something you enjoy or like about being Jewish? It can be anything.
- What is something you find difficult or challenging about being Jewish? It can be anything.
- What would you tell a friend, who has never met a Jewish person, about what Jewish people are like?
- If you could change one thing about Judaism, what would it be? It can be anything.
- Have you ever felt embarrassed, or proud, to share that you were Jewish? When?
- How are you feeling about being in (hebrew school, preparation for Bar/Bat Mitzvah)?
- What do you wish your parents would do differently as Jews?

Lesson One, Part B

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Establish a ritual or routine of a sharing circle, in which everyone has the chance to share or pass. This can be a great way to start class, or end class as a closing circle. This activity works best with practice. Students may not share a whole lot the first time you do the circle. They need practice to grow comfortable with the routine. You can set a theme, like High Holidays, in which all of the comments need to relate to the H/H somehow, or you can keep it completely open. Encourage students to all share at least one thing. Sharing something that the student experiences as positive is called an "Esther" and sharing something the student experiences as negative is called a "Haman." For example, a student's "Esther" might be that she got an "A" on her test at school that day, or that he got to hang out with friends during High Holiday services. A

student's "Haman" might be that he got in trouble with his parents, or that she got so hungry while fasting that she almost fainted.

When someone is done sharing their Esther and Haman, everyone says, "***shemati***." (see Part A of lesson plan for information on the word *shemati* and its meaning).

Continue to establish the culture of emotional safety by allowing students to share or pass on an "Esther or Haman." This is a variation of "Roses and Thorns" and is the same idea: a student can share anything on his or her mind while others listen quietly and respectfully. The Esther can be anything positive and the Haman can be anything the student is feeling challenged by.

MATERIALS

Small stone or other 'special' object, stress ball or other fun item to pass around during Esther and Haman share out. Only the student holding the object is the one who can talk.

ASSESSMENT/OUTCOME

Students rate themselves at the end of the first activity to give you immediate feedback on how it went. Have a transparent discussion on how it could go better, and what went well. This can be called 'pluses and minuses.'

If students are demonstrating increased verbal sharing with each other, then the "Esther/Haman" Listening Circle is an effective tool. You can also empower a student to lead the circle after they get practice with it.